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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 597

By Cooper

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dr. George W. Irons, Sr.,  
distinguished university educator, and one of the  
South's premier distance runners.

WHEREAS, Dr. George Vernon Irons, Sr. served as Distinguished Professor of History and Political Science at Samford University for forty-three years; as Distinguished Professor Emeritus for twenty-two years; as a colonel during World War II, with thirty-three years of active and reserve duty; as captain of the University of Alabama Track and Distance teams; as member of the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame for twenty-two years; and earned his doctorate degree at Duke University before joining Samford's faculty in 1933; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Irons, a champion athlete at the University of Alabama in the 1920s under Tennessee legend, Coach Wallace Wade (three-time Rose Bowl winner at Bama), has been described as "the South's premier distance runner, record-breaking athlete, 'Ironman of Alabama', true great of athletic history and scholarly Christian gentleman"; and

WHEREAS, the South's "chariot of fire" as a freshman, he broke Alabama's record in the two-mile distance event at the S.I.A.A. Championship which was hosted by the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee in 1921; Dr. Irons later broke the records for the 2, 3, 5, and 4-mile distance events, as Southern Conference Champion of the S.I.A.A. (now Southeastern); and

WHEREAS, long before immortal great, Coach Paul 'Bear' Bryant, had won a single game, before Bama had played its first Rose Bowl game, George Irons, the "Crimson Machine," was blazing a Crimson streak of victories across Southern skies, establishing an athletic tradition, which would become the hallmark of Bama's gridiron power in collegiate football, smashing records in all distance events as "Ironsides" and the "Knight of the Cinderpath," taking on the best of northern competition, and shattering records, some of which incredibly still stand 75 years later; and

WHEREAS, he and his athletic efforts have been heralded by legendary Coach Paul Bryant as "truly outstanding athletic achievements"; by Coach Wallace Wade as "the greatest distance runner of his day"; and by Coach Hank Crisp as "a self-made distance star for the Alabama Crimson Tide; in 1978, Dr. Irons was inducted into the prestigious Alabama Sports Hall of Fame with athletic greats such as Paul Bryant, Joe Namath, Kenny Stabler, Jesse Owens, and Sachel Paige. Dr. Irons is the only University of Alabama Track and Distance man, and the only distance man ever inducted into the Hall of Fame, rare records he holds over thirty (30) years after the Hall's creation; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Irons was a Phi Beta Kappa honors graduate, Rhodes Scholar Nominee and distinguished Samford University educator, teaching Florida State Head Football Coach Bobby Bowden and seventeen students who later became university presidents, a record. He has been acclaimed by presidents and governors alike, and honored in our Nation's Capitol by the United States Senate on August 30, 1976, as America's foremost educator; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Irons distinguished himself in World War II, rising to the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army, and serving thirty-three years active and reserve duty, a Samford faculty record; he was granted full military honors, a twenty-one gun salute, and America's farewell salute in proceedings on the floor of the United States Senate on September 21, 1998; and

WHEREAS, he was a brilliant lecturer and historian. Dr. Irons received the George Washington Medal from the Freedom Foundation of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania in 1962, for his speech: "Liberty, America's Weapon of Might"; as an Alabama Historical Society founding

member, he authored numerous published articles on Southern history, attending the last Southern Historical Association's Convention in Memphis, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, he was a role model and teacher for nearly half a century to Tennessee's sons and daughters at Samford University, who later distinguished themselves in their towns and cities as admired leaders who were grounded on the principles which forged the American Nation and created a country which would become the leader of the free world; and

WHEREAS, his wife, the late Velma Wright Irons, was a nationally recognized educator in her own right, having founded Alabama's first public class for visually handicapped children; she and George were the parents of two fine sons, Dr. George V. Irons, Jr., a practicing cardiologist in Charlotte, North Carolina, and William L. Irons, a prominent Birmingham, Alabama, lawyer; he was also grandfather to Dwight David Irons, graduate of Middle Tennessee State University and now a junior executive with Microsoft, in Charlotte, North Carolina; and great-grandfather to Dylan A. Irons, native citizen of Murfreesboro, Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we commend, honor and celebrate the life of Dr. George V. Irons, Sr., as a true great of athletic history, a Southern Conference record-breaking champion athlete, a distinguished university educator, and a valiant military veteran of World War II, who defended his nation in war and peace for a third of the 20th century.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.